

The Culture Quiz

by Judie Haynes

1. You are a 4th grade teacher with a new boy in your class from Syria. He speaks very little English. He is having a problem getting along with the other students. He has fights on the playground every day which he seems to provoke by constantly touching the other boys.
2. You have a new Korean girl in your 4th grade class. The other students in your class don't want to sit next to her because they say she smells funny. You have a bad allergy and can't tell. She appears to be a clean, well-dressed child and you don't understand your students' objections.
3. You are a 3rd grade teacher who is having a parent conference with parents of an Asian student in your class. You explain to the parents that the child needs to spend more time working on his homework. The parents keep nodding and saying "yes" as you explain your reasons. You are disappointed when there doesn't seem to be any follow-up on the parents' part.
4. You are a 5th grade teacher who is using a lot of cooperative learning strategies in your classroom. In the middle of the year you get a new Syrian boy in your class. The student doesn't follow any of the rules you have explained through a bilingual classmate. He is very disruptive in your class.
5. You are a 6th grade teacher with your first student from China. She came with an excellent report card from her school in China. She is outstanding in math but can't seem to learn to read.
6. You are Ms. Smith, a 3rd grade teacher. You don't think your new student from Egypt is placed in the correct grade. You set up a meeting with the parents to discuss placing the child correctly. The student's father comes in to see you but doesn't seem to take your concerns seriously.
7. You are a first grade teacher. A Korean student comes into your class in April. During a discussion of age and birthdays, this student says that she is 8 years old. The other students in your class are turning seven. The office tells you that she has been correctly placed.
8. Guadeloupe is a smiling 3rd grader from Argentina. She seems well-mannered and eager to please. However, when you speak to her she refuses to look at you.

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9. You are a 4th grade teacher who wants to write a quick note home to an ESL student's family. You pick up the pen that you use to mark papers and write the note. When you hand the note to the student, she looks upset.
10. The Japanese mother of one of your 1st graders picks up her child every day at your door. You are upset because this mother seems unfriendly. She never smiles at you and you wonder if you have done something to offend her.
11. Haitian brothers Jean-Baptiste and Jean-Pierre are often late for school. They are also each absent about once a week but on different days.
12. Your new Kurdish student seems to be sick all the time. He is lethargic and doesn't seem to even try to learn what you are teaching him.
13. A Russian student, who has learned English and is able to do much of the work in your 4th grade classroom, copies work from other students during tests. When you talk to him about this, he doesn't seem at all contrite. His parents act like you're making a big deal about nothing.
14. You have a Puerto Rican student in the 3rd grade who speaks English fluently. She participates orally in your classroom and socializes well with her peers. She even translates for other students. However, she is doing very poorly in her content area schoolwork.
15. Your 4th grade Malaysian student seems to be very good at Math. He gets "100" on his spelling tests. No one in your class knows the names of the state capitals better than he does. However, he seems to have a hard time comprehending a simple reading passage.
16. Some of your most advanced ESL students do not understand many of the geometric concepts which are taught in American classrooms from kindergarten.
17. Thi Lien is a new student from Viet Nam. She seems bright and alert but gets no help from home. The papers you send home are still in her backpack the next day. Important correspondence is never acknowledged. She doesn't do homework and forgets to bring back library books. Her home life appears to be very disorganized.
18. Pablo is a well-mannered boy from Colombia. He insists on calling you "Teacher" instead of your name which you are sure he knows.
19. Hung is a bright ESL student in your 3rd grade class. He listens to you attentively and follows directions well. However, he is very rude when a classmate is speaking. He either talks to his neighbor or day dreams. He never joins in any class discussions.

20. You are a 3rd grade teacher. Your new Syrian student speaks Arabic. He seems to hold his pencil in a very clumsy way and has a great deal of difficulty even copying work in English.

21. Maria is a Mexican student whose attendance in your 6th grade class is very poor. It is affecting her academic performance. After an absence of several days, you ask her why she was out and she explains that her aunt was sick and her family went to help her. Although you explain the importance of good attendance in school, the same thing happens a few weeks later. You wonder if Maria's family considers education important.

22. Mei, a new student from China, is scheduled to begin your 4th grade class in the middle of the school year. On the day she registers, she is introduced to your class and shown where she will sit. She is to begin school the next morning. You arrive in your classroom at 7:45 a.m. for a day which begins at 8:30. Mei is waiting at her desk in the dark. The custodian tells you that she arrived at 7:00 a.m.

23. Korean parents bring you a gift because you have helped their child. You open it and thank them profusely for their generosity. The parents look uncomfortable.

24. You notice that a Muslim child in your classroom refuses to take a sheet of paper from a classmate. This isn't the first time this has occurred.

25. You have applied for a cultural trip for teachers to China. You know that you will be meeting other teachers along the way. You buy small gifts for them and wrap them in white tissue paper. At your first stop during the trip the recipients of your gifts upset.

26. Thu is a 6th grade girl from Thailand. She becomes hysterical when the other girls tease her by playfully mussing up her hair. Her parents have to come to school and take her home. While you understand her need to look tidy, you think she has over-reacted.

27. During a parent conference you tell the parents of your Colombian ESL student that their child is having difficulty in learning English. You suggest that they only speak English in their home. The parents look confused. When you relay this conversation to the ESL teacher in your school, she is very upset.

28. You are a 4th grade teacher. You have a friendly boy in your class from the Dominican Republic. He speaks very little English in the classroom and doesn't seem to be making much progress. When you give him directions, he seems to be confused. You are sure he is putting one over on you by pretending not to understand because you have heard him speak with the other children on the playground.

29. You are a fourth grade math teacher. Ayumi is one of the brightest students in your class. She has been in the country for 2 years and it is obvious her background in math is superb. She can not seem to understand the units on fractions. You don't know what to think.

30. As a reward for good work in your class you give students a packet of 4 pencils with decorative erasers. Your Japanese students take two and leave two behind.

31. Jean Pierre is a 5th grade student from Haiti. Your class is studying long division. Jean-Pierre hands in his completed paper in a short time. You are upset because he has not completed the work. There is no work showing. You think the problem is written backwards. Maybe the student has a perceptual problem.

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32. A Egyptian student in your 3rd grade class is a good math student but becomes disruptive when you teach a math lesson using math manipulatives.

33. You have a new 3rd grade student from Bosnia. During recess time, the child hides under a bench and can not be persuaded to come out.

34. You have a new sixth grade student from Asia. The student appears to have an attitude from the first day. Now he is out of his seat fooling around and you've just motioned to him to come over to talk to you. He glares at you and seems even more angry. What happened?

35. As your second grade class lines up for a field trip, you count your students as you walk down the line touching each of them on the head. You notice that several students pull back from you.

36. You take photographs of your students working in small groups for a Back to School Night. The grandmother of one of your Chinese students is very upset when she sees your photo of her granddaughter.

37. You signal "O.K." by making a "O" with your thumb and forefinger to a student who has done a good job. Your 8th grade newcomer from Brazil looks very shocked.

Responses to Culture Quiz by Judie Haynes

1. American boys in grades 4-6 do not touch each other except during contact sports or when fighting. This is the way they are socialized. In Middle Eastern countries boys playing on a playground are constantly touching each other. When a Middle Eastern child does this on an American playground, he will end up in many fights. The American boys see this as “sissy” behavior.
2. Different diets produce different body odors. Americans smell bad to some people in other cultures because they eat a lot of meat and drink milk. In the case of the Korean child, a diet heavy in garlic could be the reason for the odor.
3. Nodding and saying “yes” does not mean the parent agrees with you in Asian cultures. It means that they hear what you are saying. Most Asian parents would be too polite to disagree with the teacher.
4. This student could come from almost any culture. The organization of a cooperative learning classroom may look chaotic and undisciplined to new students. They can’t tell what the rules are. This student probably came from a class where the teacher lectures and the student’s role is more passive.
5. Unlike Japanese or Korean, the Chinese language has no sign/symbol correspondence. This basic reading concept is very difficult for students learning to read in English. Students need to go back to the beginning and learn to decode beginning phonics.
6. Often males from Middle Eastern countries have difficulty accepting a female teacher as a decision maker. Even if the family is not Muslim, very traditional roles for females are prevalent.
7. Everyone gains a year on the Lunar New Year. If a child is born in September, they will turn one in January or February, depending on the date of the Lunar New Year. This student has counted her birthday as of January 25th. Many Asian children lose a year of their age when they come to the U.S. and this needs to be explained to them.
8. In many cultures it is considered rude to look directly at an adult or a person considered of a higher status. This is so instilled in some students that they find it very difficult to learn to maintain eye contact.
9. Oops! You have used a red pen and written a note to the parents. This is very upsetting in many cultures where red is the color of death. Pay attention to this especially with your Korean students.
10. Japanese adults smile at friends and other people they know well. They do not use a smile as a way to say hello. Some Asian people seem to smile at everything. They feel it is correct to smile a lot like Americans but they don’t really know culturally when a smile is appropriate in American culture.

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11. They may be staying home on different days of the week to baby-sit for a younger sibling who does not yet attend school. They may be late because they have family obligations to help parents who are working. They may not have clean clothes for two that day.

12. Lethargy and illness are signs of culture shock. A student coming from a totally different culture and environment is going to be in shock. The greater the difference between the home culture and the American culture, the more severe these culture shock symptoms may be.

13. In many other cultures, copying from someone's paper does not receive the same reaction as it does in American culture. There is a lot of pressure on students to achieve any way they can. Many cultures in the previous "communistic block" countries see copying as a way of putting one over on the government. It is not considered "bad." American standards for academic honesty must be clearly explained.

14. This student has acquired BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) but has not yet acquired CALPs (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) needed to learn in content areas. Many of our second language learners are exiting ESL programs at the BIC level. We need to work on CALPs before these students are exited. Good BIC skills also fool mainstream teachers, who think that a child speaking with friends on the playground, is just being lazy when not doing his/her work.

15. The skills this student excels at are all "rote memory" skills. This reflects the education of the students country where memorization and regurgitation are the way students learn. Asian students may become excellent at decoding words. Their parents think that they can read and they may even fool their teachers for a long time. They may not have good reading comprehension skills.

16. Math is not taught in a spiral manner in many other countries. American first grade math curricula introduces terms such as "cone" and "rectangular prism." Geometrical concepts are taught each year. Students from other countries may not learn much geometry before the 5th or 6th grade.

17. Many parents are working long hours to give their children a better life in America. They may get home very late. They may be overwhelmed with their day-to-day routine. If your correspondence is in English, parents may not be able to read in English even if they speak it. Some parents may not be literate in their first language. It is important to keep this in mind.

18. In many cultures, it is rude to use the teacher's name. Respect is shown by addressing the teacher as "Teacher." When Pablo has enough English to understand, explain the American custom of using your name without the preface "teacher."

19. In many cultures the teacher is the center of all learning. Other students are not seen as a source of information. These students need to be directly taught to listen to others, to express their own opinions, and join class discussions. One way to do this is to ask Hung what his classmate just said. If he doesn't know, have the classmate repeat it. Ask him if he agrees with an opinion.

20. This student is used to reading and writing from right to left, back to front. It will take longer to relearn this and to hold the pencil in a way that is appropriate for English writing.

21. Maria's family considers education important but family obligations have a higher priority. Keep up a constant communication with the parents.

22. Schools in many countries begin much earlier. Some schools in China begin at 7:00 or 7:30 in the morning. You need to have a translator or Bilingual Parent Volunteer tell her and her parents what time school starts.

23. Koreans consider it rude to open a gift in front of the giver. Gift giving is very serious business. You don't want to show any signs of a lack of appreciation for the gift. In order to avoid this, gifts are not opened in the presence of the giver.

24. The student is probably handing the paper with her left hand. In many cultures the left hand is seen as "unclean." You don't hand people objects with it.

25. White is a sign of death or a funeral. Rewrap those gifts in red paper.

26. In Thai culture the head is where a person's soul resides. It is very important not to touch a child's head.

27. It is better for parents to speak a rich native language than a fragmented English. Remember that any concept taught in native language will eventually translate to English. It is never appropriate to tell parents to speak only English in their home. If you moved to Japan, would you be able to speak only Japanese in your home.

28. This child has learned some of his BICs (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills). He has not yet mastered academic language which takes much longer.

29. Fractions are not very important in the rest of the world where the metric system is used. A fraction would be expressed in decimals.

30. Two is considered very lucky and four is very unlucky. Give gifts in twos.

31. This is the way division problems are written in Haiti and in many South American countries. Students in other parts of the world figure the problem out mentally. They do not write down the work.

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32. Students from many other cultures will not be used to working with manipulatives. Students may become disruptive because they do not take this type of lesson seriously.

33. Children from war torn countries may be very sensitive to town whistles for ambulance or fire or even the school bells. School staff members need to be aware of how frightening these bells and whistles may be. Fire drill bells may cause a problem for any new student from countries where fire drills are not practiced.

34. The student is probably angry because he has had to move away from all that is familiar. Culture shock plays a part in this behavior. How did you motion for the student to come over to you? Beckoning with one finger is rude in many cultures. It can be a gesture reserved for animals.

35. This is something primary teacher do all of the time. To be on the safe side refrain from touching any Asian students on the head.

36. For conservative Chinese people, it is very bad luck to have a picture taken with an odd number of people. Three people in a picture is considered especially unlucky, especially for the person in the middle.

37. This typical American sign for "O.K." is recognized in most of the world. However, it is very crude in a handful of countries, Brazil being one of them.